

# COMMITTEE CORNER:

## ACLP Research Fellows



The following interview was conducted with **Jessika C. Boles, PhD, CCLS, Lead Research Fellow.**

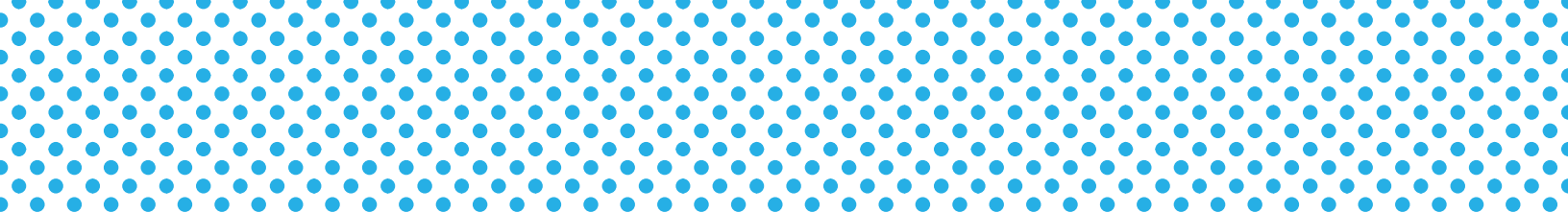
**What is the charge of the research fellows committee? What do the research fellows provide for the ACLP and the child life community?**

The charge for the research fellows is two-fold. There's an internal side in which we're able to extend our research experience and expertise in a consultative capacity to the ACLP Board of Directors. We can help advise on different projects that require data collection or requests to partner with other organizations based on the research they've done. The external part of

our charge is to increase awareness, knowledge, and engagement in research in the child life community for students, professionals, program leaders, for ACLP committees and everyone who's involved. That charge can take on several different forms. That can look like us providing conference presentations. At this year's annual child life conference, we did a presentation that was a research rapid review that looked at high impact articles that came out in the last year to help people access that information. Sometimes we help partner with other committees, whether it be writing for the *ACLP Bulletin* or if its working with the Mentorship Committee to provide a mentor webinar about research skills.

**What does it mean to be a research fellow? How is this similar or different from a typical ACLP volunteer role?**

Most ACLP volunteer roles typically sign on for a 2-3 year term. Research Fellows are different in that it is a lifetime appointment, as long as you stay in good standing with ACLP membership and maintain your CCLS credential. It's meant to be a prestigious role, on par with what American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and other organizations do to both recognize and harness research strengths in their community. Being an ACLP Research Fellow indefinitely gives us a lot of continuity across people and projects over time. It allows us to intentionally recruit diverse research expertise to maximize the input and support we can give to the child life community. We do have a lead fellow position that is a three-year rotating term, to make sure we don't burn people out and to make sure others get opportunities for leadership. The rest of our fellows are at large, there's no leadership



structure within them, there's no senior or junior designation. Once a research fellow, always a research fellow.

**How does someone become a research fellow?  
What are the criteria and how can they apply?**

We open the application once a year in September for people to apply to be considered as a new fellow. We typically only take one new fellow per year, so it's a bit competitive. Our application is relatively straightforward, demographic info at the beginning, a resume or CV, an academic writing sample which can be a paper from a peer-reviewed journal, a chapter for a book, a research thesis, or any writing that shows your ability to use your academic voice, and several short essay style questions that tell us about your stance on research and evidence-based practice in the child life field to kind of get a feel for how you see the value of research and what directions it should go and then what are the most important research priorities for the child life field at this time. That helps us get to know people's passions and interests so that we can evaluate how they can add to the rest of the group and build on what we already have. Anyone is eligible to apply as long as you're in good standing with ACLP, and you have demonstrated experience in research design and conduct. An advanced degree is preferred, but not required, experience with academic writing, dedication to expanding evidence base for child life practice, and ideally but not required but someone who has presentation experience outside of ACLP conferences, so at medical conferences or nursing conferences or other psychosocial conferences. And that helps us see that people have experience translating "child life speak" into what is effective for other disciplines that we can harness support from.

**What is your role as the lead research fellow?**

I do a lot of partnering with ACLP and members in the community to identify what the research

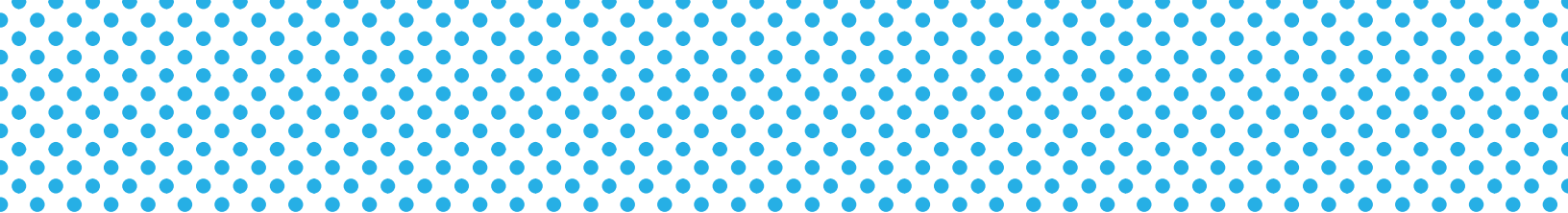
needs and interests are, and those sort of come directly to me first and then my job is to engage the rest of the research fellows to best meet those needs. I do a lot of organizing our Basecamp, our agendas, our minutes, keeping people on track, and ensuring we stay on schedule for our different projects. A lot of our inquiries come directly from members who send me an email or send an email in the ACLP office, and perhaps their ask is something like they need help figuring out how to navigate authorship ethics, how do I advocate for myself, and that makes its way to us so we can invite them on call or share resources to help them advocate for themselves. Or we get calls from people who say they have this data but have no idea how to analyze it - "I've never done any of this statistical stuff, can yall help."

**How did you get in the position of lead research fellow?**

In 2020, I was approached and asked to create the research fellows from a board directive. Quinn Franklin (at the time was the President-Elect) approached me with the idea and asked if I could help start it. I'm always down for a new challenge, so we opened up an application process, with the goal to take three to five people the first round to give us a pool of folks to work with and build this program from. Luckily, we got some great applications. We were able to select the first five which were Sherwood, Sara, Kathryn, Cara, and Kia. Together, we gave input as we tackled our first task which was really developing a formalized charge. Since then we've added one new fellow each year, so we're up to eight fellows now.

**What is one thing your committee has accomplished in the past year that you're most proud of?**

We do a lot of things that are under radar. We support the monthly research emails that come out each month. We help find the articles, we



spend hours scouring different databases and journals picking those high-impact articles and then we partner with the Professional Resource Committee to write the summaries of the articles that come out in the emails. I also created a tool for the *ACLP bulletin* recently about how to conduct a literature search to accompany an article. We've made student resources on how to get involved in research, we've created documents that give recommendations for outside conferences that child life specialists could present at and information on their submission guidelines and timelines. I think what I'm most proud of is what we were able to accomplish at conference this year. We were able to give the research rapid review presentation which was super well attended, the room was packed. We gave an overview of major guidelines that came out this year from the AAP, APA, and other related organizations that might impact how child life specialists practice. And then we overviewed four high-impact research articles that could have implications for child life assessment and intervention, giving an overview of those and opened a discussion of how you apply them to practice. We also hosted an all-day writing intensive at conference. We had folks who had projects they've been working on and hadn't had protected time or support to write. I think we're hopeful that we can keep providing pieces like that both in conference and then we offer a mentor webinar through the mentorship program about making data-driven decisions that's been really popular. We love the opportunity to talk to people directly and share about research.

### **What are some of the ongoing projects the research fellows are working on?**

Right now, we're working on a couple resources that we hope to share to the child life community. One of them is going to be some guidance on authorship ethics because that's a common

request that comes to us. Child life specialists have partnered with doctors, nurses, or other healthcare professionals to conduct these research studies but then they don't know what their entitled to in terms of authorship recognition so they end up not getting any authorship at all, or they end up getting listed in a really tiny capacity when really the study couldn't have happened without them. Another thing we're working on is another webinar for the ACLP mentorship series. We're going to present around how to conduct effective literature searches. If you search the word "legacy" for instance, you're going to get a million results because there are genes that are called legacy and digital things called legacy that have nothing to do with child life. So sometimes if we have a little practice or training in how to change up our search words or how to use the filter systems to our advantage we can get quicker and better results. There is also an article in this issue of the Bulletin that discusses this topic as well as the resource I developed to go along with it. And finally, we wrote up several abstracts for conference. We're hopeful to bring back the research rapid review and the writing seminar, and another idea about collaboration for research. Whether collaborating across academic and clinical, or across clinical groups, or clinical and non-profit, to give some examples of how that work is being done.

### **How can a child life specialist access support from the research fellows?**

Email is usually easiest, they're welcome to email any of us directly. We don't have a formal request form on the website, just shoot us an email saying "I'm so and so here's what I'm looking for, how can you help."

### **Is there anything else you'd want to get out to the child life community about how the research fellows program can provide support?**

We're nice people. This is our job, we do this all

the time. All of us scaffold and mentor students who've never taken a research class before all the way up to professionals who've been in the field for years and this isn't their cup of tea, they need to do it and want to do it but have no idea where to start. There's no prerequisite level of knowledge that's needed to reach out to us. Just because our names are on articles and websites doesn't make us different than anyone else, we're happy to talk, come say hi to us at conferences, send us emails, chat us up on ACLP connect. We're super accessible people who love to help. We're not too busy to be accessible.

